Aquatic Conservation Focus Areas in Greatest Need (Tier I)

Lower Clark Fork (149 River Miles)

Figure 20. Lower Clark Fork River Focus Area

The Lower Clark Fork River originates at the confluence of the Clark Fork River and the Flathead River near the town of Paradise and continues to the Idaho border. The Lower Clark Fork River is bordered on the south by the Bitterroot Mountains and on the north by the Cabinet Mountains. At the point where the Lower Clark Fork leaves Montana, it is the largest river in Montana based on mean annual discharge. Average annual precipitation in the Lower Clark Fork drainage is quite high in comparison to other portions of Montana due to a significant maritime influence. Relatively wet and warm winter conditions commonly lead to rain-on-snow events that significantly affect the hydrology of tributaries to the Lower Clark Fork River by increasing the frequency of high flow. The Clark Fork River has been substantially altered by the construction of the Thompson Falls, Noxon Rapids, and Cabinet Gorge hydroelectric dams. These dams currently impound approximately 63 miles of the river within Montana.

Associated Habitats

Habitat Type	Habitat Tier	Acres	Miles
Intermountain Valley Rivers	II		149
Lowland Lakes	III	812	
Lowland Reservoirs	III	11,637	
Mountain Lakes	III	3,607	
Mountain Streams	I		2,053

Associated Species of Greatest Conservation Need (Tier I Species)

There are a total of 27 aquatic species that are found within the Lower Clark Fork River Focus Area. Tier I species are listed below. All associations can be found in Table 25.

Invertebrates: Western Pearlshell

Fish: Westslope Cutthroat Trout and Bull Trout

Conservation Concerns & Strategies

Conservation Concerns	Conservation Strategies
Culverts, dams, irrigation diversions, and other instream barriers that fully or partially impede fish movement and reduce connectivity of habitat	Removal or modification of barriers in a manner that restores fish passage to ensure full migratory movement
Modification and degradation of stream channels caused by various construction or land management practices	Restoration of stream channels or streambanks to a condition that simulates their natural form and function
Riparian vegetation effected by range and forest management practices and streamside residential development (such activities destabilize streambanks, increase sediment inputs, reduced shading, and remove woody debris)	Support government and private conservation activities that encourage and support sustainable land management practices in riparian areas
	Modification of riparian management practices such that riparian vegetation is allowed to recover
	Develop statewide riparian best management principles
Entrainment of juvenile and adult fishes by irrigation diversions or other water intakes	Screening or modification of irrigation diversions or other water intakes in a manner that prevents entrainment of fishes
Alterations of the quantity or timing of stream flows, causing dewatering or unnatural flow fluctuations that diminish the quantity or quality of essential habitats	Implementation of various water conservation or flow management practices that restore essential habitats and simulate the natural hydrograph
Water chemistry problems that arise due to municipal discharge, irrigation return water, and other sources	Work with municipal government and private landowners to reduce point source pollutants

Unnatural hydrograph and water temperatures associated with the presence and operations of large dams	Work with appropriate authorities to restore hydrograph that mimics the natural regime
Non-native fish species	Support activities to promote natural habitats that support native species
Misidentification of fish species by anglers	Increase efforts to educate anglers on the identification of fish species

References

The Nature Conservancy. 2004. Canadian Rocky Mountains Ecoregional Assessment. Four volumes including Report, Appendices, Conservation Area Descriptions, and Maps.